DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 178 SP 006 970

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TITLE	International Understanding Via Student Teaching Abroad.
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Dept., Moorhead State College, Moorhead, Minnesota 56560 (Free of Charge)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Cultural Exchange; *Foreign Culture; *Foreign Relations; *International Education; *International Programs; Programs; *Student Teaching
IDENTIFIERS	International Schools Association of Geneva

ABSTRACT

The Student Teaching Abroad (STA) program at Moorhead College is a coordinated effort to place qualified teacher education candidates in private international schools abroad. An assumption of STA is that international understanding will be increased through an exposure to other cultures; therefore student teachers are encouraged to live with local families--not with other American students. Another STA goal is to enable the teacher to provide his students with an enriched classroom experience. (Student responses to the program are presented.) (JB)

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INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING VIA STUDENT TEACHING ABROAD

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Student Teaching Abroad (STA) is a program at Moorhead State College which coordinates the placing of qualified teacher education candidates for student teaching in a foreign country. The students are primarily placed in private international schools throughout the world. It is characteristic of these schools to have English as a medium of instruction, to be basically supported by tuition, and to have students of many nationalities making up the student body.

A basic assumption of STA is that international understanding will be increased by getting acquainted with individuals of other countries on an in-depth day-to-day basis both in and out of school during the three month period of overseas assignment. Therefore, it is considered of utmost importance for the student teacher to live with a local family or independently in local housing facilities. Arrangments to live with American families overseas or with groups of other American students are discouraged.

A survey of STA past participants of two or more years ago indicates that this assumption is valid. The consensus of their responses preponderantly concludes that there is an increased understanding of cultural differences and a conscious increase in tolerance and open-mindedness towards others collectively and individually.

Representative quotes from the 46 respondents in the survey to the question, "Why or why not was this experience of personal and cultural value to you?" illustrate this in several ways:

> "Having lived in a culture unlike my own has better enabled me to appreciate and understand the society in which I live. I acquired many new foreign friends with whom I still correspond."

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"I now follow European events much closer."

"I'm more tolerant and open-minded because of working with people of other cultures and backgrounds, you must learn this -- or fail."

".....by having experienced the life of another country one can no longer think or live only in terms of his region, state, or country."

"I am more 'world conscious.' It is easier for me to empathize with the unfamiliarity that frequents the changing urban and suburban areas."

"I found that people who don't like America can still like an American."

"I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to live with a German family while in Berlin. This was my first exposure to a culture different from my own. I have kept in contact with the family."

"Much more tolerant and open-minded. Prejudice is based on ignorance; therefore, new experiences and knowledge helps."

Another aspect of key consideration ancillary to the goal of enhancing international understanding is what effect the STA experience has on the classroom work of those now teaching. Past participants conclude unanimously that it does make a difference as noted by representative quotes from responses to the question, "Do you feel that you are able to give your pupils something enriching and worthwhile as a result of living and working in a foreign culture?"

"Yes, I regularly give talks and demonstrations on life in Switzerland."

"Yes, in all areas of subject matter the experience has been of great help."

"Many times I make reference to concerts and other activities. Students enjoy hearing about real life experiences."

"I use my slides in my French classes. I can describe for them real people and situations which books can never really express."

"I can now help my students to view the world on a broader scale. I learned to look at new ideas and individuals and evaluate them for their own values."

This program is available to all students of the Minnesota State College System under a common enrollment procedure and to others through cooperative arrangements with their home institutions. STA, which originated in 1968 in cooperation with the International Schools Association of Geneva, has placed 200 elementary and secondary student teachers representing 15 universities and colleges in 26 countries on six continents. An effort is made to place the participants in a geographical area of his preference which may particularly enrich his academic background and expand his cultural horizons.